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A New Athenian Discovery

By A. D. FRASER

WITHIN the last few months a discovery has been made at Athens which has given rise to wide-spread and unusual interest among students of ancient art. In a small yard, in the rear of a modern factory in the vicinity of the Ceramicus, a considerable portion of the old Wall of Themistocles emerges above-ground. While the earth and rubbish were recently being cleared away from this spot in the course of construction-work for a garage two finely-preserved bases of Pentelic marble were removed from the lower courses of the masonry. The blocks have been removed to the National Museum at Athens, and the official archaeological report concerning them and the sculptures which they bear is awaited with much interest.

The bases, one slightly larger than the other (one 78 cm. square, 30 cm. high; the other 80 cm. long, 59 cm. wide, 28 cm. high) are engraved, each on three of its sides, with sculpture in very low relief, but of extraordinarily careful and delicate workmanship. The monuments have suffered but slightly at the hands of time, and still retain much of the red coloring-matter originally adorning the background of the scenes, which, taken in their entirety, seem more closely related to the black-figure and red-figure vase-painting of the period to which they belong than do any other contemporary monuments in stone. The fourth sides of the blocks were, presumably, not exposed to the public view, and hence are left plain and smooth; a socket is cut into the upper surface of each base, apparently for the insertion of a stele or statue.

The scenes depicted in the reliefs represent incidents in the daily training and amusements of the Athenian *ephebe*. On the right and left sides of the

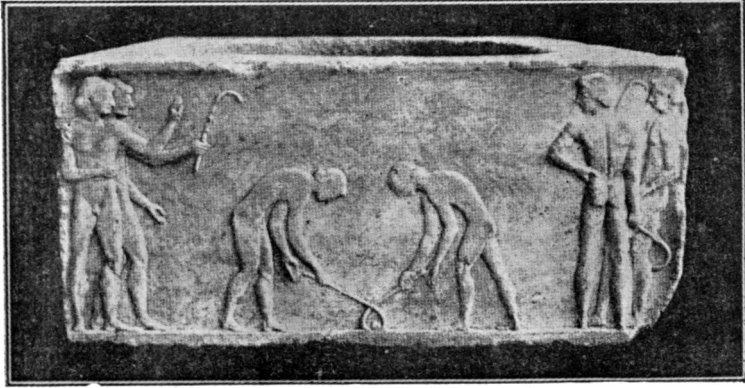


FIG. 1



FIG. 2



FIG. 3

slightly smaller stone (for the sake of convenience we may call the smaller, Block A, the larger, Block B), we see warrior-groups, both headed, as it were, towards the front of the block. The scenes are identical, except that on the left-hand face (Fig. 2) the right side of the soldiers is shown and *vice versa*. In front is a quadriga driven by a charioteer in long chiton and wearing an Attic helmet. Behind him a fully-armed hoplite, with Corinthian helmet pushed back from his face, is mounting the chariot; and in the rear follow two other similarly-armed warriors. The *motif* is a favorite one with the Attic vase-painters, and the harmonious balance in the arrangement of the figures preserved here, as well as in the other scenes, is strongly reminiscent of the methods of ceramic ornamentation.*

The scene which appears on the front of Block A is one of singular novelty (Fig. 1); and it would surely indicate that the game of hockey is no modern invention. Two nude youths confront each other, holding in their hands (both "right-hand" fashion, be it noted) curved sticks such as were used in the old-fashioned game of hurley or "shinny," the ancestor of the modern hockey. Between them, under the curves of their sticks, lies a ball, and the two players are quite obviously "facing-off" at the beginning of a game. Behind each lad stand two men, three of whom carry the same sort of club and presumably act as "wings." The fourth man keeps his eyes fixed on the "centres" and has his left hand raised to the level of his face. It seems altogether probable that he is the referee of the game and stands in readiness to give the word for the first clash of sticks. Apart from the conventional arrangement of the men, it is manifest that we are here looking at something strikingly fresh and unique in ancient art, and at a picture in stone which is executed with extraordinary dash and spirit. The figure in rear view is unusually bold and reminds one of

*Cf. also the famous Corinthian crater of the sixth century B. C. in Berlin, representing the departure of Amphiaraus, Furtwängler Reichhold, *Griechische Vasenmalerei*, pl. 121 and text for another Corinthian example; for Attic examples cf. Reinach, *Repertoire des vases peints*, II, pp. 32, 59, 72, 74, 131, etc. Could, by any chance, the statue of Amphiaraus mentioned by Pausanias I, 8, 3 have stood on this base? D. M. R.

the similar figure on a red-figured cylix of Chachrylion in the Louvre (Hoppin, *Handbook of Attic red-figured vases*, I, p. 166).

On the left side of Block B another type of ball-game is in progress. The players are divided into two confronting teams of three men each, and the pastime which is here engaged in may be only a variation of the modern "volley-ball." The party on the left of the relief have just gained possession of the "sphere," and are seen advancing as though to hurl it at their opponents; the latter seem to be falling back with a view to catching the ball. The front face of this block shows a common palaestra-scene. Two youths are wrestling with arms locked around each other's shoulders. Behind each athlete stands a second man—the one on the left apparently a "second," the one on the right, who carries a pole, probably the referee of the match.

The sixth scene—on the right face of Block B—is the most elaborate and doubtless the most interesting of all (Fig. 3). In the centre two young men are seen facing, the left-hand man seated on an upright-legged stool, or *diphros* the right-hand man on a cross-legged, "camp-chair-like" contrivance, an *opladias* (cf. Hoppin, *op. cit.* II, p. 81). The former leans on a staff and holds in leash a small dog; the latter, holding a staff in his left hand, likewise restrains by a cord an animal apparently of the feline tribe. The dog and cat confront each other in a martial attitude and a combat between the two seems imminent. At the extreme left of the relief we see the (somewhat battered and disfigured) form of a man who supports himself by a long stick held crutchwise under his left arm, and looks on at the proceedings with close attention. At the opposite extremity of the panel another man, fully clad, leans forward on a stick and lays his right hand on the left shoulder of the seated man in front—but whether in protest at the barbarity of the sport that is anticipated, or whether the better to gain a view of the same, may be open to question. The dog in the centre is of the sharp-muzzled, Spitz breed so often shown in the Greek vase-paintings. The identification of the other creature is more doubtful. It is longer, slenderer and wirier than the *Felis domestica* with which

we are familiar. I am strongly inclined to believe that it is a specimen of the *αἰλουρος*, a word frequently mis-translated "cat," but meaning properly the "marten-cat" or "pine-marten" (*Mustela martes*). This animal, we know, was domesticated by the Greeks and the Romans, and was used by them to rid their houses of troublesome rodents. It is described as a creature very strong, agile, and fierce, and might thus have been a good match for a dog even three times its size, as in this instance. The marten-cat, also, has a somewhat long neck and tail; it is of slender build and high in the hind-quarters; and its face is more sharply pointed than in the domestic cat. These features seem all to be present in the little demon which so boldly confronts the dog on the relief.

The date of the sculptured bases may readily be fixed approximately. The fact that their provenance is the Themistoclean Wall establishes a *terminus ad quem* of the year B. C. 479-478 to the period to which they may belong. Doubtless, they are two of the monuments that the Athenians, in their frantic haste to forestall the machinations of the jealous Spartans, built into the structure. For we are told that the wall was constructed, in part, *ex sacellis sepulcrisque*. On the other hand, the type of art manifested in the reliefs is strangely advanced and mature for the archaic period. Probably the National Museum authorities are right in assigning both stones to about the year B. C. 500, though it might seem that the rather superior workmanship of Block B should call for a later date in its case. Most notable is the comparative ease and grace of the figures and the postures in the cat-baiting scene, as well as the fine elaboration of the folds of the drapery, which is not unworthy of the chisel of Phidias. The artist has here had a difficult and unusual form of scene to depict, and his success is extraordinary. The treatment of the hair is, however, stylized and bordering on the archaic, while the human eye is throughout shown in full-face when the head is in profile. The forms and attitudes of the hoplites recall the figure on the Stele of Aristion, but our relief shows a distinct improvement over this work,

which is dated before the close of the sixth century. In general, I think it may be said that these two newly discovered monuments are typical of a period of transition, in which the Athenian sculptor was casting aside the outworn traditions of his craft, and was, as it were, feeling his way to the adoption of the standards which we associate with the Periclean Age.